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CIA Agent Felt Arrests Unlikely

A CIA agent said yesterday that he was convinced that former CIA translator Karl Koecher would not be arrested when he promised Koecher and his wife their freedom in exchange for testimony on their suspected espionage activities.

"It was a foregone conclusion on my part," said Jerry Brown, chief of the CIA's counterintelligence division. " . . . Everything I said was within the context that this was going to happen. I was convinced of that."

Testifying at a preliminary hearing to suppress 27 reels of recorded conversations between Koecher and federal intelligence officials, Brown said he was unaware that Koecher might be prosecuted until four or five days after he and FBI agent Kenneth Geide began questioning Koecher on Nov. 15, 1984, in a midtown Manhattan hotel.

The testimony completed four days of hearings before U.S. District Court Judge Shirley Wohl Kram in Manhattan, who made no immediate ruling.

Koecher and his wife, Hana, were arrested last Nov. 27 as they prepared to leave the country for Vienna. He has been accused of spying for communist Czechoslovakia while employed by the CIA from 1974 to 1977.

Brown admitted promising Koecher and his wife that they would be free to leave the country in exchange for information. He also said that he led Koecher to believe "we were more than satisfied" with the information Koecher gave them.

He said that his promises of safe passage were sincere because, to his knowledge, the FBI had insufficient information to arrest Koecher and "I had no means of stopping him" from traveling to Vienna. He later admitted he was not authorized to promise Koecher immunity from prosecution, but he never told Koecher he lacked that authority.

Brown said he first learned of possible plans to prosecute Koecher from FBI agent Ted Booth. Because of his concern, Brown said that he and Geide met with their superiors in Washington on Nov. 20. After that meeting, the FBI had Koecher sign seven documents stating he had been made no promises, according to earlier testimony. Defense attorneys are trying to suppress those waivers.

In other testimony, FBI agent Richard J. Dorn Jr. testified he told Koecher's wife that she would be free to leave the country. Dorn said he had no authority to grant immunity, but made the statement to induce her cooperation.